Wells Fargo’s Adams Gave up Nomad Life for Local Roots

Sunday, June 6, 2010

Adams: “I was tired of being a gypsy”

Nine cross-country moves in 21 years were enough for Pamela Adams.

Adams, a former executive with Lancaster, Pa.-based Armstrong World Industries Inc., left a career in building products to stay put in Orange County.

“I was tired of being a gypsy,” she said.

Adams went from running a division at Armstrong—a maker of floors, ceilings and cabinets—to being a financial adviser at Wells Fargo Advisors, a subsidiary of Wells Fargo & Co.

She said she made the change “to do something meaningful.”

Adams now runs the Adams Financial Group of Wells Fargo Advisors as first vice president/investment officer in Irvine.

She manages investments for wealthy clients, including business owners or those who’ve recently sold businesses.

Adams was one of five businesswomen honored at the Business Journal’s 16th annual Women in Business award luncheon May 25 at the Hyatt Regency Irvine.

She started as a financial adviser with St. Louis-based A.G. Edwards & Sons Inc., which was bought in 2007 by Wachovia Corp. Wachovia became part of San Francisco-based Wells Fargo & Co. in 2008.

The job has allowed her to stay put.
“I decided my friends and my community were more important than titles and big paychecks,” Adams said.

The investment world is a long way from Armstrong, where Adams built a career selling building supplies to architects and contractors.

Adams originally had no plans to join Armstrong after graduating from Oral Roberts University in Oklahoma. With a degree in business administration and a minor in German, she said she had little interest in sales.

Her father, an architect, persuaded her to give Armstrong a try.

She joked that she planned to give it five years and wound up spending 21 years with Armstrong, traveling the globe.

She started in Minneapolis as a marketing representative selling to architects and contractors. Adams soon transferred to Dallas after doubling sales in Minneapolis.

Two years later, she started tackling national accounts, calling on companies such as Holiday Inn Hotels & Resorts, part of Britain’s InterContinental Hotels Group PLC, and Fort Worth, Texas-based RadioShack Corp.

Her division saw record growth, according to Adams. That made her a candidate for an assistant manager position in the Philadelphia area.

“I was probably one of the few women who ever got assigned to a second assignment,” Adams said.

She transferred to Armstrong’s headquarters to take over the newly created assistant marketing manager position, which at the time was little more than a job description.

“They basically said, here’s a desk, a new line of business and a division and told me to make something out of it,” Adams said. “That was in 1986. When I left it was the second most important job in the company in that business unit.”

She moved on to Washington, D.C., in the late 1980s to oversee a new regional office. Adams said she grew revenue by half to $24 million and doubled market share for Armstrong in the region.

Adams then moved back to the home office to take a position that in 48 hours she suggested be eliminated because of high overhead and low returns on investment.

“I was rewarded by being put into another job that didn’t exist with the goal to grow our market share in Asia, where 90% of the world’s cranes were at the time,” Adams said.
After Armstrong restructured, Adams found herself stationed in California for what she thought would be at least four years.

“I figured I was going to be here long enough to finish an MBA,” Adams said. “I thought I’d finish it and move on like I always did.”

Relationships Adams built at the University of California, Irvine’s Paul Merage School of Business tied her to OC.

When a new Armstrong job came up in Pennsylvania, she said she opted to commute from her newfound Mission Viejo home rather than make a wholesale move back east.

In 2000, Adams left Armstrong for a job with the Mission Viejo arm of building products company James Hardie Industries Ltd., which has its roots in Australia and now is based in the Netherlands.

“I left Armstrong because I didn’t want to move anymore,” Adams said. “It’s kind of corny, but I had established a sense of community.”

Within a year, Adams found herself unemployed when James Hardie closed the division she worked for. She said she then spent a year traveling the globe via cruise ships.

The local relationships she forged brought her to A.G. Edwards.

“I woke up one morning and realized I needed to do something with my life,” Adams said. “It was a change, but similar in that I had to grow a business from nothing.”

All the while, Adams boosted her local ties. She was recruited to be founding chair of the Dean’s Leadership Circle at the Paul Merage School of Business, where she’s helped raise almost $2 million in support for the business school.

Adams joked that she hopes her next career move will be as a movie and restaurant critic, where she’s paid to eat and watch movies.

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